

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT

THE FUNERAL

OF

MRS. MARTHA RICE,

MARCH 7, 1844.

By CHARLES HODGE.

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SERMON.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,—

Could we look once more on the placid countenance of our departed friend, I doubt not, we should say one to another: Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile! There lies one who never gave offence, and never was offended. Who loved every body, and whom every body loved. One who suffered long and was kind; who envied not; who was not puffed up; who sought not her own; was not easily provoked; who thought no evil; who believed all things, hoped all things, and endured all things. One who went about doing good. Who diffused her own sweet and cheerful spirit wherever she appeared; soothing sorrow, calming asperities, cheering the desponding, making every one happier by making every one better. There is not a poor person, there is not a child, there is not an adult in this community, that does not feel that he has lost a friend; one who took a kind interest in his welfare, and was ever ready to sacrifice her own comfort to do him good.

All this was due not to mere sweetness of natural disposition; that doubtless she had, and had in an uncommon degree; but it was the Spirit of Christ dwelling in her that produced these fruits of holiness. Her excellencies were Christian graces; having their root in Christian doctrines, and in Christian faith. This was manifested by the character of those excellencies themselves; by the manner of their exhibition; by the motives which she avowed and enforced, and especially by the compass of those traits of goodness which made her what she was. It was not merely the social virtues which adorned her character; but a devout, humble, penitent, believing, devoted spirit; delighting

in the worship of God and in the service of Christ, and the salvation of sinners. All this she exhibited through life; and all this was most conspicuously displayed on her dying bed. From the commencement of her illness she felt and avowed the impression that her sickness was unto death; yet there was no repining, no misgiving, no want of confidence in the love of God, or in the merit of Christ; no questioning the willingness of God to save. She took the promises as they stood, in all their freeness and extent, and found, as they had sustained her in life, they were adequate to her support in death. She enjoyed without interruption an intelligent peace, the best of all gifts and the highest of all attainments.

An eye that can survey all the affairs of the world; that can see all the doings of men; all their efforts of intellect or virtue, sees nothing on our earth, so sublime as the calm and confident entrance of an immortal spirit into the eternal world. There is faith in its most exalted exercise. To the eye of sense every thing beyond the grave is utter darkness. The eye of reason can discover nothing there but indistinct shapes and shadows; and all of them portentous. To enter that unknown and awful world with joyful confidence; to step off the earth with assurance of safety, with no seen support, is the greatest achievement of which our nature is capable. When this confidence flows from ignorance or delusion, it is of no higher moral value, than the quietness of the sheep which is led dumb to the slaughter. But when it is intelligent; when the soul knows itself, knows what sin is, what God is, what eternity is, and yet with joyful confidence makes the decisive step, it is a victory which calls forth shouts of gratulation and peals of praise from angels to Him, by whose power the king of terrors is conquered by even the feeblest of his children. In these songs and praises we should join.

Of course it is not meant, that no tears should be shed over such a loss as this; that such a woman,

wife and mother, such an ornament of our church, such a blessing to our community, should be followed unlamented to the tomb. That were impossible. The loss is great; it is irreparable; it will be felt long and with increasing severity. Still we should not, and we cannot, mourn as those who have no hope. The sorrow is great, but it has no bitterness. It is death indeed, but death without a sting. Such a victory has been achieved, such an inappreciable good has been attained, that the joy swallows up the sorrow; the good is eternal, the pain is but for time.

If dear brethren we are to die the death of the righteous; if our latter end is to be like theirs; if we would derive either the consolation or instruction which their death is suited to afford, we must ask them whence their victory came; we must learn the ground of that hope which even death cannot shake. If we were ignorant on this subject; if we had no knowledge of the way in which everlasting well-being beyond the grave, can be secured: if that knowledge were to be now first announced, and if it could be appreciated and embraced as soon as presented, we should start to our feet and make the heavens ring with our thanksgiving and praise. It is however not less precious because it is not new. The shipwrecked mariner struggling with the waves and darkness, when he first feels his feet upon the solid rock, has indeed the joy of sudden transition from imminent peril to perfect safety, but his sense of the value of that rock and his gratitude for deliverance, continue when the mere tumult of joy has passed away. Though the gospel therefore be to us no novelty, we cannot lose our sense of its value, while we feel it is our own support in every trial, and when we see it sustaining our friends in peace and safety, even in the darkness and terrors of death.

When our Lord drew near to the grave of Lazarus, he uttered in the ears of the weeping Martha, that great truth which is the only source of a rational confidence in death, and the only living fountain of

consolation to the bereaved. I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE: HE THAT BELIEVETH IN ME THOUGH HE WERE DEAD, YET SHALL HE LIVE.—John ii. 25.

The death which sin has brought upon our race is a most comprehensive ruin. The noble creature formed after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, invested with universal dominion upon earth, surrounded by every source of happiness, clothed with a body through which he had communion with the beautiful world around him, formed for immortality, when the sentence of death lighted upon him, was stripped of all his glory. His likeness to God was lost; his knowledge was no longer divine; instead of having the same apprehensions he was in conflict with his Maker as to all the great truths on which his well-being depended. His views of God were darkened and perverted. The divine attributes no longer appeared harmonious. Justice seemed inconsistent with mercy; holiness with benevolence. He was no longer a Father, but a hard master; and every new exhibition of his character or purposes excited wonder or opposition. All his ways seemed mysterious; contrary to what man thought right or wise. With the knowledge of God we lost the knowledge of ourselves. Our souls became a labyrinth; our origin, nature and destiny a riddle we could not solve. Everything was shrouded in darkness, when God, the source of all light, withdrew himself from the soul.

In losing knowledge we lost righteousness. There was nothing to guide conscience. The sense of obligation, the perception of the difference between good and evil, remained; but having no spiritual apprehensions of truth, there was nothing to secure the right direction or proper authority of that inward monitor. It was often wrong; condemning what God approved, and approving what God condemned. His laws appeared too strict, his threatenings too severe. The accordance between his will and our will was gone.

With knowledge and righteousness, holiness of course perished. There was no longer delight in God as the supreme God; no longer desire after communion with him as the true life of the soul. But in the place of love of God, appeared the love of self; and even envy, malice, hatred, and all other evil affections. This was that spiritual death which followed sin. As soon as Adam sinned, he died. He was separated from God in whom alone we live. The dissolution of the body was but as a drop in the ocean of evil included in the word death. So small a part of the curse is it, that it is often overlooked, as when Christ says: He that believeth on me shall never die. The crumbling of the body into dust does not deserve the name of death. The soul is the man; it is only when that dies, the man dies.

It was this loss of the divine image and the consequent favor and fellowship of God, that was the death threatened as the penalty of sin. The soul retained its immortality, but it was only an immortality of death; an unending existence in a state of opposition to God, of conflict with all that is true and good; of darkness, confusion, and turmoil in our own nature; of evil passions and the upbraidings of conscience, and of the unknown and unutterable pangs which the soul endures that is at enmity with God and in perpetual conflict with itself.

We must not, however, conceive of the death which follows sin, as a mere natural consequence. The most awful part of it is, that it is a judicial infliction. The strength of sin is the law. Death is a penalty of which justice secures and guarantees the infliction. It is right the sinner should die, and therefore he must die. It is this that makes death eternal; because it debars access, so to speak, to the only source of life. It cuts the soul off from God, by whose power this spiritual death might be removed, and with it the inconceivable misery of which it is the cause. If the wages of sin is death; if it is right that the transgressor should

be banished from the presence of God, then so long as God does and must do right, so long this banishment must continue. That is, the Bible teaches us, that it is inconsistent with the holiness and justice of God that he should enter into communion with sinners; and without such communion there can be no life. It is the justice of God therefore which makes death inseparable from transgression. It is the law which gives sin its power thus to ruin the soul for ever.

Into this state of death we are born. We are dead in sin. We are by nature the children of wrath. This is a fact. It is a thing done. Whether we can account for it or not; whether we can reconcile it with the perfections of God or not, it is a fact. We are sinners. We are alienated from God; our understandings are darkened, our wills perverted, our affections polluted. For any man to deny this, is the clearest evidence of its truth. To assert that sinners are conformed to the image of God, are like him in knowledge, righteousness and holiness; are living in communion with him and in the enjoyment of his favour, is to show how entirely we have lost all true conceptions of God and of the life of which he is the author.

It is from this death which follows sin, and in which our whole race is involved, that Jesus Christ came into the world to deliver our souls. Unless therefore we have correct apprehensions of the nature of that death, we cannot understand the nature of that life which he has come to give. That life is always described as a deliverance from death, and as perpetual conformity to God and the enjoyment of his favour. Hence Christ says: I am both the resurrection and the life. He not only redeems from death, but he gives life.

The life therefore of which our Saviour speaks, includes deliverance from the whole of that death which sin has brought upon our race. Deliverance from the wrath of God and the penalty of his law; from the darkness, perversity and sin that reign within us, and from the otherwise hopeless and endless banishment from his presence.

It includes the restoration of the image of God to the soul. We are made to know God, to see his glory, and to apprehend the harmony, the beauty and excellence of his attributes; all our views of truth, as far as they extend, are coincident with his. What he declares to be true, we receive as true; all the revelations which he makes we embrace with confidence and approbation. Our wills are accordant with his will. His laws we see to be holy, just and good; we acquiesce in his dispensations cheerfully, as wise and right. Our affections are purified. They tend towards God. They fix on him as the chief good, and delight in him as the only adequate and suitable portion of the soul.

This life includes also communion with God. There are depths within us which are never reached; there are capacities which are never called forth except in intercourse with our fellow spirits, so the full development of that life which the soul is capable of living, is due only to intercourse with God; to the communications of his love, to the manifestations of his glory; to the giving of Himself so that we are filled with the fulness of God.

This life is eternal. It is begun on earth, but is here fitful and imperfect. We know only in part; we see through a glass darkly; our apprehensions are often wrong, always inadequate. Our wills often rebellious, our affections cold and distracted. Still, though feeble it is life, and life eternal; a pledge and foretaste* of what is to be hereafter. So faint, however, are the lineaments of the divine image, which are now drawn upon the soul; so feeble are the pulsations of that new immortality which has been communicated, that though the sons of God, it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but when Christ appears, we shall be like Him. It has never yet entered into the heart of man to conceive, what the beatific vision of God is; what it is to see him as he is, to know as we are known. Nor can we tell what it is to be perfect in holiness; nor what

that glory is, which is to be revealed in us ; nor how our powers will be enlarged and purified by intercourse with saints, angels, Christ, and God ; nor what undiscovered capacities of bliss lie concealed in our own being, or in the mystery of our union with Christ. Who can tell all that He meant when he said : "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them ; that they may be one, even as we are one, I in them, and thou in me that they may be perfect in one?" Beloved ! it doth not yet appear what we shall be ; nor can we conceive what she, whose death we strangely mourn, already is !

The redemption of Christ is not confined to the soul. As our bodies are his members, they are partakers of his life. They must die indeed, in the same sense that a seed dies. The body is but sown. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption ; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory ; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power ; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, the dead shall be raised incorruptible. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? This song of triumph the believer is often able to utter for himself, when he comes to die ; but its full meaning will not be known until it bursts simultaneously from redeemed millions, on the morning of the resurrection. Nor shall we know all that Christ meant when he said I am the resurrection and the life, until the new heavens and the new earth shall appear, rising from the ashes of the old, and the sons of God shall raise a louder song of praise than at the creation of the world, over that new creation, not called into being by a word, but purchased and purified with the blood of the Son of God.

We are therefore not only permitted to follow in im-

agination the souls of believers, with the assurance that at death they are made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory ; but we deposit their bodies in the grave in the sure hope of a blessed resurrection, knowing that even their bodies are united to Him who is the resurrection and the life.

The scriptures not only teach us the nature of that life of which the Saviour spoke, but also how it is he becomes our life.

We have already seen that the death under which we lie by nature, is inflicted by a judicial sentence ; that justice has condemned sinners to death, that the law gives sin its power. There can therefore be no deliverance from death, no restoration to life, until that sentence is reversed ; or until justice is satisfied. Christ then is our life, because, in the first place, he made a complete satisfaction to divine justice. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. He died, the just for the unjust. He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He redeemed us from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for us. Inasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he himself likewise took part of the same, that by death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them, who through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage.

By thus enduring the penalty of the law in our stead, the obstacle, otherwise insuperable, arising from the justice of God, was removed out of the way. It is no longer wrong, it is no longer inconsistent with the divine perfections, that God should have fellowship with sinners. Their whole relation to him is changed. They are no longer under the law, and are not dealt with as the law demands, but they are under grace ; and for Christ's sake and considered as in him, they are regarded and treated as righteous. They are made the righteousness of God in Him. Thus it is that Christ is our life. He delivers us by his own death

from the sentence of death under which we were bound.

But this is not all. As the death under which we labour is not only a penalty, but an actual spiritual death, so Christ not only delivers us from the curse of the law, but he imparts new spiritual life to the soul. This he does because he is life. As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself. He is the true God and eternal life. It is not we that live but Christ liveth in us. Our life is hid with Christ in God, and when Christ who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory. As I live ye shall live also. As the members of the body live in virtue of their union with the head; and as the branch partakes of the life of the vine, so it is that Christ communicates life to his people. We do not pretend to know all that these passages mean; or to understand fully the nature of the union between the soul and Christ, by which it becomes a partaker of his life, for the apostle says it is a great mystery. It is, however, clearly revealed that Christ does impart to his people new spiritual life, that that life is dependent on him and derived from him and connected with his life, so that they live because he lives. The same truth is often expressed in scripture, by saying that the Spirit of Christ dwells in us; or that he gives the Holy Spirit, to be and to abide with his people as a source of knowledge, holiness, joy and peace. It is therefore by procuring, and imparting and that continually the Holy Spirit, which dwells in all his members, in a manner analogous to that in which the soul of a man pervades and animates his whole body, that Christ is our life. This life, consisting in knowledge and holiness, in fellowship with God, is supremely blessed; and having its source in him and not in ourselves, not being in our own keeping, it is eternal. I give unto them, says Christ, eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. This life, as we have seen, extends

to the body, as well as to the soul; for as the apostle tells us that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, so on account of the indwelling of the Spirit, our bodies shall be quickened and made like unto the glorious body of the Son of God.

Christ is the author of life in this full and precious sense, **TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH.** He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Such is the power of faith, that though a man were dead, and thus to all appearance, beyond the hope of recovery, if he believes, he shall live. And if any one restored to this spiritual life, has this faith, he shall never die. His salvation is secure, as neither life nor death, nor things present nor things to come, nor any other creature, shall ever be able to separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

A great part of the value of the gospel lies in the doctrine that salvation is by faith; no matter how abundant the source of life in Christ; no matter how suitable and precious that life in itself might be, if it were suspended on any condition, save that of simply receiving it, it would be beyond our reach. It is because God requires nothing at our hands but to believe the record which he has given of his Son; because he simply demands that instead of seeking life where it cannot be found, we should seek it where alone it is; that instead of endeavouring to give life to ourselves, we should lay hold of the life that is in Jesus Christ; it is because the gospel is thus simple, that it is suited to our condition. Alas! what should we do, if our salvation were suspended upon the number of our prayers, or upon our alms, or upon our convictions, or the measure of our sorrow, or upon any thing to be done or experienced by us? How should we ever know, whether we had prayed enough, given enough, or repented enough? How could a soul buffeted by disease, exhausted by sickness, distracted by the terrors of death, make such calculations, or mea-

sure its doings by the prescribed standard? There could be no peace; no victory over death; no confidence toward God, if such were the conditions of salvation. But when the soul sees that Christ has done everything, and is everything; that He is our life, that simple reliance on him secures salvation; then our very weakness is our strength, then the simple falling helpless into his arms, gives us eternal life. As this doctrine is written all over the Bible, so it is confirmed by the experience of all God's people. I am persuaded you never saw a Christian die in peace, when it was not manifest that he discarded everything, brushed away all the rubbish of his own doings and experience, and took the simplest views possible of the gospel, and laid hold of the simple written promise, He that believeth shall be saved. There, on something out of himself, he rested; there he stood calm, collected, confident, joyful, triumphant, while flesh and blood failed, and while the world and all things known, receded from his sight. Those views of the gospel which Christ gives his people at the hour of death are the right views. They are the views which save the soul. They are the very views which those who are seeking salvation, must be led to take. The gospel is never preached more simply, more clearly, more in its pure essence, than by the dying Christian, constantly repeating,

My faith looks up to Thee
Thou Lamb of Calvary
Saviour divine,

or some other single sentence, which embodies the whole gospel. When men come to die their theology dwindles down to a very small compass; or rather it is all concentrated in the one glorious doctrine, He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.

If then you would be saved, my dear hearers, learn the simplicity, the freeness and clearness of the gospel. Give over contending with God; asking why he made you, or why he made you thus. It matters little how you became sinners; how you became the subjects of

spiritual death, seeing Christ is willing to give you life, if you will but touch the hem of his garment.

As at the bed of the dying believer we best learn what the gospel is ; it is there also we best learn its value. There, not only riches and honour, but knowledge and friends fade away ; they have lost their value, they are not available. Christ is the one thing needful. He alone can remove the sentence of death under which we labour ; he alone can give peace to the conscience ; he alone can fit us for heaven or secure our admission there. Without him all is sin, misery and despair for eternity ; with him all is holiness, joy, and eternal glory. His unspeakable value, the unsearchable riches that are in him, are then most clearly seen. While in health and surrounded by the affairs of the world, our views are all apt to be perverted. We place a false estimate on the relative importance of the present and the future, of the seen and the unseen. These false estimates and the delusion out of which they arise, are dissipated at the approach of death. Then eternity is the present and the seen ; time is the past and the unreal. Then our eyes are opened to see what shadows men pursue, and what substantial and enduring good is found in Christ. Then he is precious beyond all estimate, and the soul is absorbed in the sense of his love, his fidelity, and his suitableness as a Saviour.

To surviving friends the exhibition thus made of the love and power of Christ, the practical evidence afforded that he does save, that he does deliver from the fear of death, that he does give that peace, and joy, that delight in God, and that sense of his favour which are themselves salvation, so fills the heart with gratitude towards him, so enhances our sense of his value, and of the certainty and blessedness of the life which he gives, that there is no room for sorrow. So great is the good done to those we love, that for the time, at least, we forget that we are to see their face no more.

This reveals the true source of consolation under such bereavements. It is found in the assurance that

Jesus is the resurrection and the life, that those who believe in him, though they were dead, yet shall they live, and that those who believe in him shall never die.

It is not therefore to sorrow only, or to sorrow chiefly that we are this day called, but to gratitude, praise and thanksgiving to Him who came into the world that we might have life ; and who does give, and will give, and is now ready to give eternal life to all who put their trust in Him.

Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. *Amen.*